



NOAA Fisheries
Southwest Region
NEWS RELEASE

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**HAWAII AND HONG KONG COMPANIES ASSESSED RECORD \$620,000
FOR ILLEGAL POSSESSION OF SHARK FINS**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has charged companies located in Hawaii and Hong Kong and the captain of a fishing vessel with the illegal possession of shark fins following a record seizure in August 2002.

NOAA Fisheries has charged Tran and Yu Inc., of Hawaii, Tai Loong Hong Marine Products, Ltd., of Hong Kong, and Captain Chien Tan Nguyen with 26 counts of possessing shark fins on board a U.S. fishing vessel without the corresponding shark carcasses. NOAA assessed the parties a civil penalty of \$620,000, the highest civil penalty on record for violation of the Shark Finning Prohibition Act.

"We are sending a clear message: Those who choose to continue in the trade of shark fins must do so within the strict requirements of federal regulations," said Special Agent-in-Charge Mike Gonzales, NOAA Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement - Southwest Division. "The law requires the entire shark to be landed with the fins so that the whole fish can be utilized."

The vessel KING DIAMOND II, home port Honolulu, Hawaii, was boarded by the U.S. Coast Guard on August 14, 2002, approximately 350 miles southwest of Mexico. The vessel had 64,695 pounds of shark fins onboard with no shark carcasses. The Coast Guard detained and escorted the vessel to San Diego, Calif., where NOAA agents boarded the vessel, interviewed the captain and crew, and seized the load of fins. This is the largest seizure of shark fins in the United States since the federal law was passed in 2000.

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The investigation revealed that an employee of Tai Loong Hong Marine Products, Ltd., was on board the KING DIAMOND II after it left Hawaii in mid-June of 2002. The investigation showed that during the two-month trip, the company's representative used large sums of cash to purchase shark fins from Korean longline fishing vessels on the high seas. Fins were loaded on the KING DIAMOND II and were intended to be offloaded in Guatemala or Mexico. The final destination of the fins was Hong Kong, where there is a vast market for shark fins. In Hong Kong the fins are used to make shark fin soup, which is considered to be a delicacy.

The Shark Finning Prohibition Act, which is part of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, is a federal law that makes it illegal to possess shark fins without the corresponding carcasses. In addition, it is illegal for a U.S. company to possess, purchase and/or sell shark fins without offloading all the shark carcasses and fins at the same time and then weigh the carcasses and fins to determine the lawful ratio of five percent fins to carcass ratio. U.S. and foreign fishing vessels may not possess or offload shark fins without the corresponding carcasses. The maximum penalties for violating the act include \$120,000 per count, and forfeiture of the fishing vessel and/or its cargo.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. To learn more about NOAA, please visit: <http://www.noaa.gov>.

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